



The Canadian Opera Company rehearses Verdi's *La Forza del Destino*.

Anthony Azzopardi's Making Opera

Cinematic adaptations of primarily theatrical experiences have often held the dubious distinction (no matter how well-intentioned) of being stodgy, stagey and downright tedious. The opera, however, has often survived the traditionally intrusive translation through the camera eye. The recent Franco Zeffirelli film adaptations of *Othello* and *La Traviata* are perfect examples of this fact. Both films display a consummate blend of stage and screen, exquisitely capturing the sweep and grandeur of the original medium and translating it quite vividly onto celluloid.

A current addition to this fine tradition of blending stage and screen can be found in Anthony Azzopardi's feature-length documentary, *Making Opera*. With grace, keen sensitivity and a great deal of economy, Azzopardi painstakingly details the Canadian Opera Company's production of Giuseppe Verdi's "*La Forza Del Destino*". Taking us behind the grand image, with occasional flash-forwards to the

final product, *Making Opera* is a fascinating and thoroughly accessible look at the creation of a massive artistic undertaking.

Azzopardi trains his camera on numerous aspects of the production — everything from the mundane to the glorious. Appropriately, the film begins during the early stages of rehearsal and leads us chronologically to the final product.

On the first day, we are treated to the chorus music rehearsal. Then, on the third day, Azzopardi focuses separately on the principals' music rehearsal. In both cases, the principals and the chorus are dressed casually in street clothes. As the days of rehearsal progress, the film then focuses upon such practical, behind-the-scenes aspects as costume-design, wig-making and fittings. At this point, we begin to see those same actors and singers in various stages of attire, some in street clothes, others in a blend of costumes and street clothes. This technique of carefully detailing the behind-the-scenes growth of the production not only adds a human element to the proceedings (wigs not fitting, costumes too big or small, actors and seamstresses joking about it), but contributes to the film's duality. There are, after all, two stories being told here: the making of an opera and the opera itself. As well, all of this "technical" detail is underscored with music and occasional

interviews with the principals. This keeps the film from being dry or tedious.

In fact, one of the film's greatest strengths is its almost universal appeal. *Making Opera* informs, but it also entertains. The approach to the material is without snobbery. Azzopardi goes out of his way to etch a compelling portrait of 500 people collectively gathered together to create — with love and passion — a work of unparalleled beauty. There are clearly no stars in the making of this opera; no one person is singled out for their overwhelming commitment over any other participant. Azzopardi addresses every aspect of the production with incredible balance. The carpenters, seamstresses, extras and stage managers are afforded as much attention as the principal performers, directors, conductors and designers.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about *Making Opera* is its reflection of the impact of music upon visuals. As mentioned earlier, the opera seems to be one of the few, if not, ultimately, the only theatrical art which can truly survive cinematic adaptation. At one point, Azzopardi focuses upon the opera's stage director John Copley, who states, "I respond to the music... [as opposed] to the rather ordinary text." Later on, during an actual rehearsal, where Copley is discussing character motivation with his principal performers, one of his colleagues remarks that "Copley motivates his work by making sense of the musical score." What's particularly important here is that Azzopardi basically provides the main reason why opera and film can be a perfect marriage. Almost from the beginning, the musical score has influenced the art of film. Whether it be the tinkling piano accompaniment for the silents, or Max Steiner's sweeping orchestral backdrops for innumerable cinema spectacles; or Giorgio Moroder's grinding, pulsating *Midnight Express* techno-poppers, film has always relied upon music to add depth and feeling to the visuals.

At another point, Azzopardi interviews the opera's set designer Robin Don, who remarks that he is attempting to capture the quality of Goya's etchings "as if the whole stage is breathing and has a life of its own." This is what Azzopardi has accomplished with *Making Opera*: two worlds in one — each living and breathing with the energy of life, commitment and fulfillment — all of this accompanied by a Verdi score.

Quite simply, *Making Opera* is breathtaking.
Greg Klymkiw •

MAKING OPERA p./d. Anthony Azzopardi assoc. p. Jack Morbin sc. Anthony Azzopardi d.o.p. Ron Stannett ed. Jack Morbin mus. Giuseppe Verdi sd. Stuart French, John Thompson, Patrick Rowan sd. ed. Gary Oppenheimer, Jack Morbin l.p. John Copley, Maurizio Arena, Stefka Ebstatieva, Allan Monk, Judith Forst, Ernesto Veronelli, Peter Strummer, John Cheek, Yuri Marusin. Produced and distributed by Cineroutes Productions Inc. With the financial participation of Telefilm Canada, CBC, TVOntario, Ontario Arts Council, Ontario Ministry of Culture and Communications. 16mm, colour, 88 minutes.

Marcel Simard's Le Grand Monde

Le *Grand Monde* was born as a decision of the administration council of Action-Santé, a group affiliated with the Point St. Charles Community Clinic in Southwestern Montreal. The idea was to produce a film which could help sensitize the public to the issues faced by ex-psychiatric patients who are attempting reintegration into society — as well as simply demystify and encourage an understanding of them.

The first interesting twist is that the members of the administration council are, themselves, mostly ex-psychiatric patients; in the last three years they have taken over control of the 15-year-old alternative resources center. Participation in the responsibilities becomes a part of their own self-administered therapy.

The second interesting thing is that once they had found a director for the project (Marcel Simard), it was these same people who worked on the script. Constructing roles based on themselves, they wrote their own parts, their own stories in collaboration with Simard — who edited it all into a story, adding some scenes of his own. Finally, with the addition of three professional actors (who are subtle enough to fit into the picture and add to it, without standing out), it is the same group which forms the cast, incarnating their stories and characters for the screen as only they could.

The result is an unqualified success. The action revolves around Action-Santé itself where we see a group of very isolated individuals who work at bridging some enormous gaps in their social relationships to function with a degree of unity. Most of the themes touch on control — the real and perceived lack of it — and a constant inner debate on the futility or worth of trying.

At one point, Emile comments on the subject of authority, on the habitual expectation of all of them that a greater authority will always intervene to resolve their problems. He convinces his friends that each of them must see themselves as the sole authority in their lives, and that this is the only way they can grow and feel a measure of freedom... So they lock out Pierrette, the community worker in charge, and begin an adventure of solidarity and responsibility — eventually getting recognition from the community clinic as an autonomous body.

This is the one big unifying story of the movie, and it is an important one; the film itself is in fact an extension of that story into our lives — a concrete manifestation of the true course of development which stands behind the fiction. But just as important are all the separate moments which flow together so well and reveal so much. Emile, who turns away Marie-Josée's sexual advances because he can't make love when he's on drugs... Marie-Josée, subsequently talking to Pierrette about being "easy"



PHOTO: MICHEL DUBREUIL

Émile, a character in *Le Grand monde*

—and it not being so easy... Or when the camera picks out the aging man with the missing teeth, the greasy hair and the life-beaten face—the kind of man you would certainly avoid looking at on the street—dancing with Pierrette at the community supper with more grace and pride in his carriage, and joy in his eyes, than anyone you've ever seen.

These are moments of magic. It is movie magic, but it is the magic of truth. And that is what makes this movie work so well. A documentary approach would have given us

LE GRAND MONDE p. *Iscl'd.* Marcel Simard assoc. p. Renée Gosselin sc. consultants Michel Langlois, Luc Blanchet a. d. Sylvie Roy continuity Françoise Dugré ed. Liette Aubin, Annie Jean sd. ed. Diane Boucher d. o. p. Philippe Lavalette key grip Marcel Breton mus. Robert Leger mix. Hans-Peter Strobl sd. rec. Gilles Corbeil, Gilbert Lachapelle, Serge Beauchemin, Daniel Masse, Marcel Fraser l. p. *Members of Action-Santé:* Ovíla Ouellet, André Massicotte, Kenny Ryan, Jeanne Lalumière, Michel Lussier, Michel Fyfe, Léa Dubois, Micheline Roy, Marie-Thérèse Dufresne, Antal Hajdu, Joseph Jean, Lise Cartier, Micheline Fontaine, André Béchard w. participation of Pierrette Savard, Cynthia McLean, Philippe Collin. Produced by Les Productions Virage in collaboratin with SRC. With financial participation by: SOGIC, NFB, U. of M., Ministère de la santé et des services sociaux du Québec, la Confédération de syndicats nationaux (CSN), Secretary of State, CEGEPS André Laurendeau, Rosemont, l'Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, the Douglas Hospital, CSSST-Montreal.

more facts, but less truth. The people of Action-Santé would have been ever-distanced and reserved subjects. But here, they are participants in making the film. Instead of the distance of documentary, we find ourselves in complicity with a fiction we nevertheless know is very real.

As we watch the participants play their roles we not only learn of their concerns, but we also see these people in full self-expression, often dealing with deep emotional issues, and that is what is so fascinating: we are getting to know them—or, at least, to want to know them. We are getting to love them. And that is the mark and the means of the film's success. After fitting itself into our everyday reality and getting us to care, how can we possibly take these people, and others in the same situation, for granted? Philippe Isler ●

Peter Gerretsen's **Night Friend**

There is no doubt that Peter Gerretsen made *Night Friend* with the best of intentions. His docudrama of the attempts of a Catholic priest to help a young prostitute on the streets of Toronto was to be, as the original title stated, "A Cry From the Heart". He also must have hoped that it could stand with *Drying Up The Streets* and *Ticket To Heaven* as achievements in the style. Considering that teen prostitution in films has been used primarily as cheap exploitation (*Angel*), conventional melodrama (*Little Ladies of the Night*), or just another example of urban sordidness (*Taxi Driver*), it was a noble aspiration. But such aspiration counts for nothing, if the execution fails to convince.

Father Jack Donnell (Chuck Shamata) is the recently appointed director of vocations for the Archdiocese of Toronto. Returning home one night from a fundraiser, he stops at a downtown corner and honks his horn at the car ahead. Suddenly he finds a young girl beside him, asking him what we'd like and how much. Although Jack is shocked, he determines to try and help the girl (Heather Kjollesdal) who calls herself Lindsay.

Jack takes to visiting Lindsay's corner each night, dressed in civvies, and offers to pay her \$350-a-night quota for no services required. He gradually discovers that Lindsay, whose real name is Carol, is from Woodstock Ontario, whence she fled her incestuous father with her boyfriend Lenny (Daniel MacIvor). Lenny wants to be a rock guitarist in Los Angeles, but is hampered by the fact that he has neither money nor talent. So both Lindsay and Lenny sell themselves to Myles (Real Andrews), a smooth-talking pimp.

Peter Gerretsen presents all this with utmost seriousness and directs quite straightforwardly. With his background in advertising, this is something of a surprise, since it is usually the habit of directors from this milieu (Ridley and Tony Scott, Alan Parker, Hugh Hudson et al.) to emphasize style at the expense of content. But unfortunately, Gerretsen misses an essential point necessary for the success of a docudrama. There has to be some *drama*, and the documentary has to reflect the truth. *Night Friend* is deficient in both these areas.

Since the producers go to great length in their production notes to express their concern for the plight of the young prostitutes in the city, the greatest disappointment in *Night Friend* is that they seem so squeamish in their approach. Neither Lindsay nor any of the other girls are ever seen doing anything beyond getting into and out of cars. Twenty or 25 years ago, such "delicacy" might have been accepted, but in the wake of *Hookers On Davie* and especially *Streetwise*, candor is the only way to honestly address this issue.

The film's credibility is also further strained by, among other things, the complete absence of the police from the streets—in spite of the fact that the location for the girls' hangout is less than a block from a stationhouse. Nor is the treatment of the priest's role that realistic, although it was supposedly inspired by Father Bruce Ritter, the founder of the Covenant House youth shelters. No religious technical advisor is to be seen in the credits.

Chuck Shamata is properly earnest as Jack, but has little depth. Art Carney is the "big" guest star, and handles his role as the crusty Monsignor O'Brien with competence, although the part is a clerical cliché that goes back to Barry

Fitzgerald. Jayne Eastwood has the thankless role of the mute bag lady who seems to serve no purpose until the end, where she becomes a literal *deus ex machina*.

Heather Kjollesdal's portrayal of Lindsay should not be judged too harshly, since it is her first professional role. Her passing physical resemblance to Jodie Foster seems to have been a factor in her casting. In making the pimp Myles a Superfly black, and the abusive father an unshaven backroads slug, Peter Gerretsen perpetuates two unfortunate stereotypes.

For filmwise viewers, there is one other howler in *Night Friend*. At one point, Jack takes Lindsay to the movies. The film they see is *Vagabond*. Peter Gerretsen intends this to be symbolic, but how many 14-year-old runaways are Agnès Varda fans?

J. Paul Costabile ●

NIGHT FRIEND exec. p. Don Haig p. Patricia Gerretsen d. sc. Peter Gerretsen d. o. p. Doug Koch cam. op. Attila Azalay, Brad Creaser ed. Michael Todd asst. ed. Darryl Cornford 1st. a. d. Roman Buchok 2nd a. d. Brian Dennis 3rd. a. d. Linda Pope p. man. Patricia Gerretsen p. coord. Barbara Bell p. account. Madeleine Meredith cam. trainee Akira Nishihata stills photog. Leslie MacKeen cont. Benu Bhandari gaffer David Owen best boy Edward Mikolic electricians John Bakker, Neil Saito key grip David Zimmerman best boy grip Ron Paulauskas grip Ruth Lyons sd. op. Urmas John Rosin boom Don Grunsten sd. ed. Michael Todd, Darryl Cornford, Anita St. Dennis re-rec. Tony Van Den Akker Foley Reid James Atherton asst. Foley Maureen Wetteland mus. Heather Conkie, Rory Commings mus. rec. Steve Ibelshauer mus. arr. Ralph De Jonge Song "Walking the Streets" by Yohanna Vanderkley, Doug Buchanan, sung by Yohanna Vanderkley set dec. Alexa Anthony props Alex Kuishera makeup Marlene Aarons assts. Pip Ayotte, Judy Murdoch ward. Tina Livingston, Jacqueline C. Barley asst. Kim Kozolanka p. a. Anne Fotheringham, Marie Vapenikova craft service John Allen catering Amazing Food Service casting Richard Conkie l. p. Chuck Shamata, Jayne Eastwood, Art Carney, Heather Kjollesdal. A Cry From the Heart production.



Chuck Shamata and Heather Kjollesdal in *Night Friend*